

THE IRISH TIMES

Letters

Newspaper by day:

Fri, Sep 27, 02

CUTS IN PUBLIC SPENDING

Sir, - Perhaps more than any other group in society, children are vulnerable to the negative impact of spending and tax policy decisions made during periods of financial crisis. This is particularly true of children living in poverty and children with special needs.

In recent days we have heard a succession of announcements and proposals that threaten to undermine or reverse a number of national policies and Government commitments on children.

Cuts in programmes for those with educational disadvantages, the threatened cancellation of the extension of the Medical Card to hundreds of thousands of families living in poverty, the apparent shelving of much of the Health Strategy and the suggestion that child benefit be taxed are but a few of the announced, reported or rumoured of cuts that involve the rights and welfare of children.

In this environment, virtually every element of the National Childrens' Strategy and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy requiring public expenditure is now seen to be at risk.

Children have a right not to live in poverty. They have a right to the highest attainable standard of health, to live in decent housing, to protection from violence, exploitation and abuse, and to the development of their full human potential.

These are among the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, rights that we are obliged to respect. They are not the kind of policies that can be set aside when revenue collections begin to slip. And they are certainly not discretionary charitable steps that might be taken only after we have fully funded the SSIA scheme or maintained arbitrarily lower tax rates for the wealthy.

To ensure that the rights and best interests of children will not be sacrificed through cuts or changes in the budget, the Government must base its fiscal and tax policy decisions on the principle that we will honour our obligations to children. - Yours, etc.,

RAYMOND DOOLEY, Chief Executive, Children's Rights Alliance, Dublin 2.